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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the development of the professional careers of a group of experienced and expert primary teachers (N=11) in England who share a commitment to informal primary education, a teaching approach that emphasizes first-hand experiences in learning along with integration of content areas of curriculum. During unstructured and intensive interviews using the techniques of oral history and ethnography, the expert teachers described their perceptions of the influences that shaped their professional histories. The interview data suggest how successful teachers view their own professional development. Analysis of the data indicates several themes that can inform educators as they structure both preservice and inservice teacher education programs. Findings suggest that continuing conversations with expert teachers about how they have developed their personal practical knowledge about children, curriculum, teaching, learning, and professional growth can further the education of future teachers. (LL)

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BECOMING AN EXPERT TEACHER IN INFORMAL PRIMARY EDUCATION[1]

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Abstract

This paper discusses the development of the professional careers of a group of experienced primary teachers in England who share a commitment to a particular approach to teaching practice. During unstructured intensive interviews, these expert teachers described their perceptions of the influences which have shaped their professional histories. The interview data, gathered by using the techniques of oral history and ethnography, suggest how successful teachers view their own professional development. Analysis of the data indicates several themes which can inform educators as they structure both preservice and inservice teacher education programs.

Introduction

> "They started by some ideas being implanted early on in college, some of which did not mean anything, some of which took root, some of which excelled, some of which [I] rejected. They were lost, reassembled, rehearsed, developed in early teaching; and that went on again in the second stage, and that is where we are at, I think."
>
> Expert primary teacher
> Yorkshire, England

At least three paths of professional inquiry have led me to the present study I report here. First, my long-term research into forms of informal, progressive primary education in England, which began in 1979 with ethnographic study in a Yorkshire primary school (Scheirer, 1983), has caused me to wonder how the primary teachers I have met learned to teach in the way that they do. The ethnographic endeavor has brought me to deep interest in the professional life histories of the teachers I have come to know. It seems important to understand what led these teachers on the road to a kind of teaching which appears so congruent with principles of child development--which appears so child-centered, if you will--and at the same time is so potentially empowering of their activity, as well as of the children's. In a sense, too, I have questioned how they have developed their craft of teaching because I have also hoped that their answers could lead to ways in which the profession might more broadly nurture the teaching approaches they embody.

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Secondly, as I have grown to appreciate that informal primary education in England has a long history of development and growth, I have begin to ask how that development has been supported on the local level among groups of individual teachers. Histories of informal, progressive education (Cremin, 1961; Cunningham, 1988; Delamont, 1987; Kliebard, 1987; Lowe, 1987; Selleck, 1972) have been instructive, though they have often focused on the broad panorama of what has occurred as movements have emerged, as practices have spread from one school to another and from one area to another, and as policy formation has both influenced practices and responded to them.

However, teachers have their own stories to tell about how they have developed professionally. These stories, when heard collectively from those who have lived in schools for many years, stand alongside the histories of institutions and policies; they comprise the history of the people who have lived in the institutions, responded to the policies, and shaped experiences. These stories become the people's history and provide a critical perspective on the nature of lived experience and how that experience is shared.

Thirdly, as one concerned with teacher education, these stories of teachers can likely inform me as I struggle to provide the undergraduate and graduate students I teach with appropriate learning experiences and useful perspectives on their professional careers. During the ethnographic research, I came to understand that these teachers developed their craft over many years and that a complex pattern of influence might lie beneath that process. Teachers' reflections on past experiences and perceptions of career development could provide an important point of view to then instruct teacher educators. Further, descriptions of this complex process as it occurs in specific settings can enlighten our understanding so that we might more knowledgeably foster and support the paths of professional growth within education as a whole.

This study therefore represents one effort to respond to these three avenues of concern. Its purpose was to explore how certain expert teachers in informal primary education--that is, "interesting, experienced informants" (Berliner, 1986, p. 8)--perceive that they have developed their practice, why they have developed in those ways, what their experiences have been and what meaning they attribute to them, how they have connected these experiences to the contexts in which they work and to the people with whom they work, and where they think they may be going in their professional growth. I frequently refer to this complex process as professional development because of that term's familiarity in our language; however, the term enculturation may also be descriptive since it stresses the dynamics involved when persons interact with social and cultural contexts.

Intensive interviews with expert teachers provided data regarding their reflections on the nature of their professional lives. The study describes and analyzes such data in terms of inherent key constructs which in turn suggest a model of how professional enculturation might occur in informal primary education.

It is indeed possible that such a process might enable us "to gain insights into the cultural themes which make up part of the tacit knowledge informants have learned" (Spradley, 1979, p. 202), thereby furthering our understanding of how professionals become expert in their craft. Experts' accounts of their professional careers may also provide needed insight into how teachers' lives in progressive or informal primary schools have been shaped and thus how professional careers might be subsequently shaped in other settings.

Further Perspectives on the Study

The teacher-education field clearly acknowledges that becoming an expert teacher is a long process with many stages which qualitatively differ from each other (Berliner, 1986, 1988). Both formal education and collegial interaction seem to play significant roles as professionals shape their pedagogical practices within the school environment.

Berliner's "pursuit of the expert pedagogue" (1986) has led to the possibility that the development of teachers' expertise might encompass "five stages of skill development" (1988, p. 1), each with distinguishing characteristics. An individual thus progresses from novice to advanced beginner, thence to competent teacher, followed perhaps by the appearance of the proficient teacher, and finally to achieving the level of expert. Berliner argues that the goal for teacher education institutions should be that of helping graduates achieve competence. He notes that "a modest number of teachers" may move to the level of proficiency, with few members of the field reaching "the highest stage, . . . that of <u>expert</u>" (1988, p. 2).

However, while experts may be relatively rare, studying their behavior can yield useful insights. In comparison to postulant teachers, that is, to those individuals with subject-matter background but no pedagogical knowledge, or to novice teachers, experts demonstrate qualitatively different approaches in interpreting classroom phenomena, in determining which classroom events are important, in using routines, in predicting classroom phenomena, in judging the meaning of events, and in evaluating their own performance (Berliner, 1988). These differences suggest dimensions along which teacher behavior may develop. Further, such comparisons might indicate the "internal criteria" (Berliner, 1986, p. 6) that distinguish among levels of complex pedagogical behavior.

"Experts' performance," Berliner (1986) notes, "provides us . . . with a temporary pedagogical theory" upon which teacher educators may help novices "learn to be more expert" (p. 6). Similarly, experts' own accounts of their professional growth and development may provide us with a temporary theory of how they view the processes of becoming expert, which we can then hone more carefully. Intensive unstructured interviews suggest one avenue by which to encourage experts to reveal their tacit knowledge about their own professional growth. This study raises the possibility that expert teachers can be a valuable source of insight into understanding the complex processes of professional growth, just as they are helpful in our efforts to define the nature of the practical, pedagogical knowledge which governs much teaching behavior.

This study also views the personal, practical knowledge of teachers as both a legitimate and rich source of information about the nature of their careers as they see them developing in their own life stories. Indeed, if such knowledge, based on personal history and experience, is useful to teachers in confronting classroom situations (Clandinin, 1986), then surely that same type of knowledge becomes useful in interpreting one's own professional development. I therefore share Clandinin's (1986) support for adopting the perspective of the teacher practitioner within educational research. I too assume that teachers "hold, use and develop personal practical knowledge" (p. 12) which can enlighten our understandings. And, in encouraging a kind of autobiographical approach to self-revelation during the interviews, I supported the use of teachers' biographies in understanding their perspectives and in "understanding how teachers, individually and collectively, think, act, develop professionally and change during their careers" (Butt, Raymond, McCue, & Yamagishi, 1986, p. 1).

The work thus moves into the world of "stories of experience and narrative inquiry" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 1) which can powerfully shape our understandings of education. The congruence of such method with our very nature as humans, as storytellers, acknowledges the importance of the personal perspective in educational research and the responsibilities of researchers to listen "gently" (p. 12) as they inquire into stories in and out of classrooms.

If storytelling can be a form of inquiry, then our research reports must also embrace the concept of scene or place which is one means of structuring the experiences which are shared (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The report of this study must, therefore, at least begin to acknowledge the professional context of the teachers who were interviewed as it may have influenced the ways they chose to share their perceptions, to tell their stories.

The schools where these teachers have taught are state-supported English primary schools, clustered in several geographical areas; the schools have shared a strong commitment to what might be called progressive, informal, or open approaches to teaching for more than 40 years. The teachers see themselves as different from others, as do their contemporaries in other settings. In fact, educators in England readily identify the schools in these regions as representing particular approaches to primary schooling. However, while their practices may share an essence or identity, it must be stressed that these have been neither uniform nor static over this period of time. What the practices reflect, perhaps, is a common philosophical commitment to basing instruction on first-hand experiences, an integration of the content areas of the curriculum, the perspective of the child, the central role of processes in learning, and the importance of relationships throughout the school environment in nurturing children's development (Hunter & Scheirer, 1988).

These primary schools, which are scattered in several regions of England, indeed comprise a special case in education--here we find shared purposes, philosophical bonds, and identifiable styles of teaching which have set these schools apart from others. Many educators have described their unique

characteristics--Clegg in 1971, Eisner in 1973, Rothenberg in 1989, to name only a very few. Several histories (Cunningham, 1988; Lowe, 1987; Selleck, 1972) describe how these schools have developed over the years, especially in reference to policy formation. Yet, while the schools carry a particular identity, they cannot be effectively characterized by easy labels such as progressive, informal, or open since these often suggest rigidity or stereotyping. As with the teachers, the schools vary in particulars while sharing common philosophies.

Such is the complex scene for the interviews of the teachers. It is against this backdrop that one must interpret the data regarding their perceptions of "how they have come to think and act in the way they do" (Butt et al., 1986, p. 1). It is also here that we can see how method, scene, teachers, and the researcher are inextricably tied together (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

The Methodology for the Study

The study used an amalgam of methodological approaches. It blended techniques in oral history (e.g., Allen & Montell, 1981; Hoopes, 1979; Thompson, 1978) with those from intensive interviewing (Williams, Karp, Dalphin, & Gray, 1982) within the guiding framework of the ethnographic interview (Spradley, 1979). In many ways one could argue that the current investigation was but another part of a long-range and encompassing ethnographic effort, except for its separation in time from the earlier ethnographic work.

The familiarity with the scene and the rapport and trust carefully built up over many years with schoolpeople indeed provided a solid base for this set of interviews regarding teachers' perceptions of their own professional development. With such a background, the questioning could proceed persistently, but hopefully not rudely (Wolcott, 1988).

Because most of the teachers interviewed were at times part of the previous observation-participation study, the current effort could easily be characterized as an extension of the earlier ethnographic interest. In essence, the teachers provided "key-informant interviews" and "life histories" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 195), long accepted as part of ethnographic research. These individuals do fulfill Wolcott's definition of informants--those "in whom one invests a disproportionate amount of time because [they] appear to be particularly well informed, articulate, approachable, or available" (p. 195). However, the focus of the study was limited to interviewing with regard to only a particular set of professional issues; therein lies a significant difference between it and ethnographic interviewing per se which typically casts a broader net of inquiry. The life histories which emerged likewise reveal only a portion of what these individuals have experienced over time. Furthermore, such interviewing reflects only part of the story of whatever the process of professional growth and enculturation might actually be in this environment--that part as <u>told</u> by the participants.

The methodology also reflected a concern for the mutual relationships which exist among researchers and teachers during research efforts into school

phenomena. Here again the ethnographic perspective which seeks understanding from within is most evident. The overriding concern was to share how teachers themselves perceive their own professional development and thus to adopt the research tone of the insider (Delamont, 1987). Yet throughout the process of representing their points of view, a collaboration of sorts emerged as "the stories of . . . participants merged with [my] own to create new stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 12). The outcome from the process is quite likely "a new mutually constructed account of inquiry" (p. 12), rather than a pure representation of only their realities.

The interviews were thus conducted very much in the context of the rapport already achieved with the informants during several years of previous research. Such rapport quite likely enabled me to contextualize what these individuals said and to bring a perspective to the process of understanding the meaning of what they said.

General questions were used during the interviews, but their purpose was mainly to keep the "conversations" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 82) within the broad topic area of how the teachers perceived their own professional development to have occurred and to assure that different aspects of the topic were addressed. The discussions unfolded to a large extent more under the direction of the informants than under my direction, although I did occasionally refocus or seek to clarify or expand upon what they said. As I said to one individual, the questions were "starting points rather than anything restrictive."

These interviews did have purpose and design, however; Spradley's (1979) elements of the ethnographic interview do characterize these conversations because they did exhibit an explicit purpose, include ethnographic explanations, and employ various types of ethnographic questions. Toward those ends, the interviews followed an outline of generic questions which were modified and reordered as necessary for clarity, to fit the context, and to adjust to the flow of the discussion. The questions quite likely also reflect the influence of categories which were implicitly developed during my previous ethnographic research in informal, progressive primary schools.

The interview questions included the following:

How would you describe your initial teacher education course?
When did you begin teaching? What were your initial experiences in teaching like?
Describe how you taught when you first entered teaching. Describe how you teach now.
How did you come to teach in the way that you do?
What experiences have you had which have affected how you have come to teach?
What challenges have you faced in teaching? How did you approach them? How did you decide on your courses of action? How do you handle such challenges now?
How do you relate to new or younger teachers on the staff?
Is there anything else you wish to say which you haven't had a chance to say?

An additional question soon became necessary because the school culture in England has been so concerned with absorbing the demands of the emerging National Curriculum. The informants' professional concerns had to be acknowledged in our discussions:

> How do you see your current practice and yourself as a professional in today's context?

Interestingly, it became apparent that the "debate" regarding the National Curriculum was perhaps also one way for the informants to consider the challenges they currently face in education.

Eleven informants were interviewed over a period of five and a half months. The length of the interviews ranged from three quarters of an hour to two and one half hours, with the average being approximately an hour and a half. No sequence was followed in scheduling the interviews; matters of convenience in the face of personal and professional pressures dictated when people consented to be interviewed. All of the informants have been teachers in schools which are identified by the profession in England as demonstrating informal, child-centered, progressive primary education which emphasizes first-hand experiences in learning and promotes the integration of the content areas of the curriculum. These people were at various stages in their professional careers, from one individual who entered the profession just three years before the interview to three who were retired. The range of time to which the teachers thus referred lent a somewhat historical tone to the discussions. Any impressions of how teachers develop professionally in these types of schools were likely then to be cast within a long-range view, rather than reflecting only what may be part of current experience. In that regard, this study also demonstrates some of what might be called the "spirit of Foxfire"; it shares Foxfire's concern for describing cultural continuity and for appreciating where the current moment or situation may have had some of its origins (Page & Wigginton, 1983).

A likely strength of this study lies in the interviewing of multiple informants about common threads in their professional life stories. The multiplicity of individuals interviewed reflects an ethnographic flavor since the several sources provide a kind of triangulation in the process of suggesting important themes. The informants also represented different types of career paths in education, each of which can offer perspectives on how professional development occurs.

Up to this point, I have deliberately referred to all the informants as teachers because my earlier research pointed out that these English primary schools traditionally emphasize the teaching roles of both headteachers or principals and the education advisors who work with many schools within a local education authority. The two lecturers in teacher education also seemed to maintain the perspective of a teacher of children, which they presumably carried over from their earlier role. This cultural perspective is not to be taken lightly, even though it is clear that multiple points of view are indeed evident in how those who were not most recently "class teachers" chose to share their perceptions of professional development.

The variety of career paths which the informants exhibited perhaps becomes clearer with the following list:

1 "Class Teacher" still early in her career
3 "Class Teachers" who have been in the profession for more than 10 years
2 Headteachers, both previously class teachers
1 Advisor, new to the position and previously a head and a class teacher
1 Lecturer in teacher education, previously a head and a class teacher

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1 Retired Headteacher, previously a class teacher
1 Retired Advisor, previously a head and a class teacher
1 Retired Lecturer in teacher education, previously a head and a class teacher

In spite of the diversity among their current roles and across their career paths, I have frequently chosen to continue to refer to the group as teachers in order to underscore the cultural commitment of these educators to teaching.

All interviews were tape-recorded; often after an interview, however, I made additional notes of informal comments by the informants, the general nature of any other conversations, and a description of the environment in which the interview took place. Many months intervened between the actual interviews and the analysis of the transcripts developed from the tapes. The data had indeed become very "cold," with the possible advantage of providing a fresher perspective on the material itself than if the data had been analyzed immediately following the interviews.

In order to mitigate against the possibility that a previous interview might have influenced how I perceived the direction or tone of subsequent interviews, I read and categorized the material in the interview transcripts in an order different from that in which the interviews were actually conducted. As a result, I hoped that any cross-over effects I observed during the interpretation might come from actual similarities in the data. Each transcript was first read for purposes of familiarizing myself with the narrative. I then read the transcript for purposes of extracting seminal material. While each person had a story to tell, my purpose in this study was to identify themes which stretch across these individual stories.

Spradley's (1979) processes of domain analysis and discovering cultural themes influenced my work. Categories for discussion emerged from the data shortly into the process of reading the transcripts. These categories then structured the material selected from the transcripts which were read later in the process. The categories include: critical events in informants' professional lives, beliefs they articulated about the nature of professional development, the role of various social institutions in their professional development, the influence of professional contexts, the influence of people, their perceptions of their own influence on others' professional development, and educational challenges which have influenced their professional development. These categories are remarkably similar to those Mandelbaum (cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1989) suggests for discussing life histories:

"(1) the dimensions or aspects of the person's life, (2) the principal turnings and the life conditions between turnings, and (3) the person's characteristic means of adaptation" (p. 98).

As the process of analysis continued, certain themes (Spradley, 1979) became evident which describe the relationships among the categories and suggest how the categories interact to affect the professional development of expert teachers. However, not until all transcripts were read and key material extracted and categorized was the material within each category examined. At this point it was possible to identify major ideas about each category, that is the within-category themes. Themes also emerged which describe how the categories relate to each other; they suggest cross-category themes.

The final step in the analysis of the data was the development of a model to represent schematically the process of professional growth as perceived by these informants. Its purpose is "to illustrate the components and interrelationships" (Beauchamp, 1968, pp. 73-74) which are evident in this study. "The story [now] . . . make[s] a point that transcends its modest origins. The case must be particular, but the implications broad" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 246). Nonetheless, the process recognizes that the model should serve only as a tool to promote necessary discussion in the field, rather than to prescribe an avenue for action.

Discussion of the Data

This section describes and analyzes the interview data, first in terms of the categories which the data themselves suggested as helpful in representing key constructs, and then in terms of the cross-category themes which arose as I worked with the data. The categories which serve to organize this discussion are the same categories which I used to organize the material from the interview transcripts describing teachers' perceptions of professional development. They include: critical events in informants' professional lives, beliefs they articulated about the nature of professional development, the role of various social institutions in their professional development, the influence of professional contexts, the influence of people, their perceptions of their own influence on others' professional development, and educational challenges which have influenced their professional development.

The order in which the categories appear in the discussion suggests an underlying logic about how they might relate to each other and how a discussion of them might best unfold. People readily identify critical events because of their obvious impact on our lives and because they do occur at a particular point in time. They are thus easy to pick out of the vast array of on-going experiences and complex interactions we constantly enjoy; they therefore provide an effective starting point for discussion. On the other hand, beliefs--particularly those about the process of our own professional development--are extremely difficult to identify but are equally useful in defining any subsequent discussion about what that development might mean; hence, what the informants shared about their beliefs appears as a second topic area in the discussion of the data.

As social beings, we humans constantly interact with social institutions such as the family, schooling, government, and the media; indeed, our lives are so often structured by our involvement with these institutions that our life stories--in this case, the stories of how we see our professional development--revolve around them. Therefore, the third area for discussion focuses on the role informants believe that social institutions have played in their professional development as teachers. The three topics which appear next relate closely to the discussion of social institutions, though they reflect a more personalized perspective: the professional contexts which informants found important to describe, the people whom they mention as important in their development, and their perceptions of their own influence on others.

The final topic area of educational challenges addresses an inclusive theme which seems important when we try to account for the paths our professional life stories take. We may see challenges occurring in our lives which explain what has happened, how we may interpret the present situation, and how we may view the future. In the professional arena, our view of the challenges we face may represent our styles in problem-solving and thus in directing our own development and growth.

Critical Events in Informants' Professional Lives

Teachers' discussions often noted the importance of particular events in their professional lives. They described several types of events as influential in their professional development.

Events outside the school setting of course often play a role. Two of the retired teachers described conditions during and after World War II as instrumental in their professional development as progressive, informal, child-centered teachers. One individual described how living with children evacuated from the cities both developed her ability to relate effectively with them and sharpened her observation skills. The other remarked that while in the armed forces, he talked with other teachers about how the profession must educate all the children, not just the brightest. These experiences profoundly shaped the direction of their work with children after the war period. Parenthetically, these observations confirm the assertion in the literature that wartime conditions in England and the needed adjustments in relationships between teachers and children had a profound influence on their development of informal, progressive, child-centered teaching approaches (Clegg, 1971; Griffin-Beale, 1979; Kettering Foundation, 1970; Rothenberg, 1989; Silberman, 1970).

Another teacher commented that her work with starting a play group and a mother-toddler group in her community was influential as she grew in her understanding of children. New positions and responsibilities did mean much to these people. One individual's involvement with the introduction of French into the primary schools was her first encounter with the importance of active learning and using first-hand experiences. She then "stretched" these approaches into other parts of the curriculum. Similarly, she appreciated the necessary "rethinking" of primary curricula which occurred when middle schools were formed. Not surprisingly, too, teachers frequently noted how their

promotions to deputy head or head stimulated their development of teaching practice.

Quite often the transitions of teachers within the school setting occasioned a shift in their practice. A common example is the decision to teach children of a different age which typically requires a conscious effort to alter one's instructional style. Learning how to approach content in new ways can also be a significant event in one's professional life; one teacher became excited about maths "for the first time in [her] life," and another discovered the benefits of using work cards to promote children's investigations.

Changes to other schools have had much influence on the professional development of these teachers.

> L:[2] I think just the whole experience of being with a lot of teachers who were excited by what they were doing was very invigorating.
>
> W: I liked what I saw. I liked the quality that I saw. I liked the quality of the work . . . but [I] didn't really understand. But I was quite interested in what I was looking at. And I felt there was something worthwhile there that I couldn't put my finger on. I couldn't understand it properly, but I felt sure there was something that was about quality and about children being involved in their work. So that was quite a dramatic change for me.

When this last teacher reflected on his move to the school he described, he commented that "it actually was the best move I think I ever made."

Several people report that changes in their professional lives followed particular periods in which they were questioning their own practices.

> W: [I] felt disaffected. It was entirely to do with not working in sufficiently intensive ways with a small group of people.
>
> M: I think I myself was beginning to feel--not bored exactly--but I was beginning to question many of the things I could do. I was beginning to argue against things. . . . But I did not know what I wanted to go to.

Particular events with people also have dramatic impact. The retired headteacher remembered a disagreement with a staff member on how to respond to a child.

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[2]When teachers are quoted at some length, I will identify them by using the initials which stand for their names.

> N: It just shattered me because this was an indictment on the way I had handled it. . . . You can't, in a small community, have anything like that.

Another individual recalled his first day of teaching when his head had advised him to "'grab a stick [paddle] and whack a few [children].' . . . And that was my indoctrination, introduction, to teaching at that time." However, such events are not always negative. One teacher remembered his "affinity" with the staff which he realized upon moving to a new school.

> W: I knew that staff and I knew the sort of warmth and positive nature that the school [has]. That made that job.

Beliefs About the Nature of Professional Development

Beliefs indeed encompass the range of human experience. However, this topic area will limit discussion to those beliefs the informants shared about the nature of professional development.

One teacher noted that teaching is "almost instinctive. A good teacher is very rarely made." From a different perspective, another suggested that people begin teaching with "a certain idealistic vision of what it is about . . . with certain notions about what a teacher should be." As someone else explained, "all you've got is a wild intuition." It is in reference to this vision that teachers then begin to shape their own practice.

One informant stressed the importance of actually doing something yourself as "the only way you really learn how to do it." While the process of growing may not be easy, she noted that she "just keep[s] plugging away at it." Another noted that it is "very important that teachers are actually excited by what they are doing."

However, the doing of something and the excitement about it may not be enough.

> F: There is feeling in it, but it must be an intellectual conviction arising from an intellectual justification of what you are doing, I suppose. . . . There were principles, and these principles held good whatever the child and whatever the circumstance [or] the methodology you actually used and approaches you used.

This point may have been why one teacher lamented an earlier point in his life:

> M: I had no philosophy at all in education. I had no idea why I was doing what I was doing.

One informant cautioned that how we view our work with children is inherently political. While we must recognize that there are "no instant

solutions," we must also learn to "frame the [learning] situation so that the possibility of failure is excluded more and more." It seems that what is appropriate for children may also be appropriate for the learning of teachers:

> N: If you dwell on your failures too much, you see, you're not preparing [for tomorrow].

The Role of Institutions in Informants' Professional Development

The teachers shared a range of perspectives about their initial formal preparation in teaching. Several remarked that their experiences were not impressive. One even recalled that at the end, she did not know how to teach children how to read--she had needed much more guidance from her college than she had received. However, one teacher acknowledged that while he was not too well served by his early college experience, it did introduce him to children and it did get him into schools; it offered him a forward-thinking educational philosophy of "working for children's interests." On a more positive note about teacher education, another teacher appreciated his initial training because it broadened him and raised his level of awareness and because he was able to "live off" of it when he began his career. Yet another was "glad" for her training which was more formal than the informal methods she began to develop later in her practice.

The least experienced of the informants described her teacher preparation as "very good" because of its practical focus of working in schools with children. Indeed, many of the experienced teachers did note that teacher-training had changed over the years, which gave newer teachers a much better background than they had had.

> L: And I think their philosophy of education is really sort of quite firmly based on their experiences there. They've been constantly challenged, if you like, by the training they've had, which I never felt I was. So I think it's very much I learning from them and they are learning from me.

This acknowledgement also suggests how more experienced teachers see themselves relating to the newer staff members.

But, to these people, teacher education does not end with the preparation phase. They cited repeatedly their voluntary involvement in inservice courses as a means to develop their teaching practice. One person described her recognition of needing help in certain curriculum areas over the years:

> J: I thought J. needs some help here so you better go on some courses and see what they can offer you. . . . [So] I deliberately signed up for some inservice courses on the three areas I knew I wasn't any good at.

The media have also played an important part in teachers' professional development. Several of the informants mentioned particular books which were "interesting reading," types of books which were useful--such as the "survival

reading" during the early stages of one's career, or authors who had an impact. One individual described Carl Rogers' points "about the importance of relating to people openly and honestly and of trusting relationships. . . . That was something that hit me quite hard."

However, there was also a concern that a list of influential books might be misleading for several reasons. Even though they may have offered new ideas and confirmed practices, readings may have been important only at a particular time in one's career or within a particular context. There is also the danger that a list developed later may omit something which might have been quite significant in one's development.

Government policy statements and reports seem important in the professional lives of these teachers. One person recalled how the Plowden Report, officially published in 1967, affected her teacher education experience and early professional practice; it provided direction for much innovative effort. There was also mention of the educational materials published by government agencies over the years, many of which were seen as quite valuable.

It was in today's context, however, that the role of government statements seemed to take on particular significance. The teachers' discussions of England's National Curriculum and its attendant policies were often emotionally charged. Even thought the complete picture has yet to be defined, these teachers have deep concerns.

> L: I find I'm having restrictions put on me by the National Curriculum. . . . I'm not very happy about it, and I think we have to find ways to make the National Curriculum fit the way we want to work rather than throwing us all out the window and trying to make the way we work fit the National Curriculum. . . . [We can't] lose sight of the fact that children don't actually learn that way.

Nonetheless, it also appears possible to offer a more optimistic view:

> R: I think the initial fear was: I believe in what I'm doing, [and] this document, this law, is going to make me change what I'm doing. I don't want to because I thoroughly believe that what I'm doing is right. Having said all that, I don't think it is going to be as bad as I first thought.

<u>The Influence of Professional Contexts</u>

The teachers often spoke of individual schools--schools where they had taught, schools where they were currently working, and schools which they may have visited. They also described the professional climate within the schools. This discussion refers to the individual schools and their climates as professional contexts.

The detail with which several teachers described their early teaching situations suggests how important those settings are likely to have been in their professional development. One description included the observation that the school wanted to "get on the bandwagon of modern education, such as it was"; however, the practice there was still rather structured and formal. She recognized, though, that she was looking back and interpreting how limited their view was on the basis of hindsight. Such a comment reminds us of the limits of memory.

In contrast, another teacher recalled how, upon moving to a new school, he noticed a "wholeness" about it; he appreciated that this environment had "some very clear whole-school practices" which fit in with where he wanted to go in his own professional growth. This example also suggests the importance of a match between context and person, a point of view which differs from that which argues that generally situations influence people.

The teachers stressed how important it is to have a supportive atmosphere in one's school. One teacher explained how such support influenced her during her teaching practice:

> R: And with this build-up of a tremendous amount of help, I developed much further along the line than some of my fellow students ever did.

She later returned to this school as a class teacher.

> R: [I] came back to the same supportive atmosphere [and] was given the chance to develop and continue to try out ideas, fail, but it didn't matter. To move on.

The nature of the relationships within the school is also frequently mentioned. If the atmosphere is relaxed, if there are "genuine friendships and loyalty among the staff," if there are "a lot of given assumptions . . . [to] rely on," the school is a "healthy" environment. As one teacher summarized it:

> L: So I think relationships in schools are very, very important and set the tone for the relationship you have with the children.

The school climate can also support the development of teachers' thinking. One individual recalled how a former head of his school encouraged the staff to think about their practice--during staff meetings he would offer a controversial statement designed to promote discussion. The head would also support teachers' efforts if they were able to justify them. The reaction was positive:

> M: "Now I have a man who will let me do what I want to do as long as I can justify it." I think that helped my thinking a bit.

His thinking was also stretched when he was frequently able to observe other colleagues' teaching from which he could then easily borrow different approaches.

The school context must be balanced, however, by attention to the other contexts of one's life. One informant was eager to stress that there is a strong need for educators to cultivate an area of life separate from the job. Such interests provide breadth, balance, and release; they allow people to "see [their profession] in context." It is important "to be scared by something else."

The Influence of People

When these teachers talked about their professional development, they most often talked in terms of the people in their lives and how these individuals may have influenced them. They spoke of particular individuals, some of whom they only knew from a distance or not at all and some who were part of their daily lives. They also referred to groups. All seem to play a role. Of course, the people who are part of our lives also form part of our professional contexts. To that extent, there may be considerable overlap between this category and the previous one. However, this material seems to emphasize the actions of persons as the influential dimension rather than the atmosphere or context which those persons may have created. Because of the volume of the material in this category, the following discussion is only illustrative of the themes which were evident.

Colleagues <u>are</u> critical to professional development. One teacher caught that flavor most effectively by describing how "thinking people" helped her own thinking develop; people were her sounding board. Another noted rather poetically that "people are always filling in your own gaps." One person recalled how colleagues inspired him at the beginning of his career; he found out early on that they had other ways of doing things which helped him realize that there was "still a lot to learn and that perhaps [he] had misread some of the things [he] had been told." By listening to others and seeing what is going on in other classrooms, he began to adopt practices from colleagues.

One retired teacher noted the influence on the development of teaching practice of "a network of people with a common set of interests, concerns, and principles." Groups of people can indeed have a collective impact. In describing how practices evolved in one authority, a teacher commented that

> W: it is almost entirely due to a handful of heads who worked with people on their staff, and those people, if they were able, subsequently became heads. . . . And they have all become heads and have moved their own schools on in the same sort of direction. They have had an influence on the staff, and some of their staff have become . . . third generation really.

Specific individuals in the lives of teachers were also most influential. Some of these were inspiring speakers heard at meetings or people who ran courses; they helped teachers understand the underlying rationale for their

efforts, both reaffirmed and questioned their practices, and also gave them direction and helped them pull ideas together. Closer to daily life, one teacher repeatedly mentioned his educator-father who influenced him substantially.

However, another teacher thoughtfully observed that a list of significant people may be deceptive. There is the temptation to list well-known people associated with particular ideas rather than to recognize those who thought the same and who were actually the individuals with whom one interacted; these fellow teachers and college lecturers could be overlooked if one were to think in terms of personality cults.

When teachers analyzed the influence other people had on their professional development, they typically described the many ways in which they were affected by them. Particular people could be a stimulus. Beyond their personal impact, seeing others do what you want to do can be inspiring. Their ideas alone could also invigorate; as one person expressed it, a respected colleague "made it all coherent and rigorous and timed and sorted and planned and seen right through properly so it was not just messing about. It was a genuine rationale for education." Another described his colleagues as "those people [who] crystallize something for you that you were already doing. . . . They draw things together."

Thus, people can serve as models for others. They can show us how to observe children carefully, they can suggest appropriate tools for children's learning, and they can demonstrate artful teaching techniques to adopt which may only later be fully understood. New colleagues on a staff and new teachers in the profession offer us fresh perspectives, as well; alternatively, their questions and struggles can remind us how far we may have progressed.

Repeatedly these informants described how individuals helped them develop their thinking:

> W: I think it's largely dialogue, isn't it? And the descriptions you have with colleagues about what you are doing and why and how it could be developed; the nature of a problem that has arisen. What are the problems and how could they have been tackled a different way? If it didn't work, why didn't it work? What could we have done that could have helped that work? Really analyzing how and why and what. . . . Ninety-five percent of the growth I have experienced has been the result of observations of children and descriptions with people that I trusted.

Together, through an "honest interaction," colleagues would struggle with issues, question and challenge each other, and thereby think things through and clarify their ideas.

Children can also promote the development of teachers' thinking--through the challenges they set or because we wish to understand more deeply why their

work pleases us. Conversations with colleagues around children's work were memorable because such dialogue about teaching is much more concrete.

Colleagues form a support system for teachers' professional development. They offer help, encouragement, advice, and a sharing of ideas. One person recalled a former head whose "aim was not to put us down but to build us up and to encourage us in a very positive way." These support systems can also exist in places other than the individual school; two teachers discussed how the other participants in many inservice courses provided both reassurance and a broadening of their perspectives.

Colleagues are also friends. The personal relationships support the more professional ones. Sometimes people are mentors; one teacher noted that her first head helped her move up in her career. At other times people give us self-confidence and promote self-worth by reaffirming and confirming our practices; as one person admitted, when that occurred, "I learned terrifically." Or, it may be simply that colleagues offer time to talk--a most important element to at least one individual.

However, despite the influence that these teachers attributed to other people in their lives, they recognized their own role in their professional development. As one informant expressed it, "the person who experiences all those events [with people] makes sense of them."

Perceptions of One's Own Influence on Others

If people are important in influencing others' professional development, then it is also quite likely that those individuals can reciprocate. The process of influence is indeed an interactive one.

Sometimes teachers choose to help colleagues because they realize that the things they take for granted are not apparent to others. One informant described her role as "on the periphery"--helping when asked, talking, encouraging, questioning, sharing. The influence is often seen as indirect, a limitation in the eyes of at least one teacher who felt frustrated about her lack of influence. The indirect possibilities for influence include, though, helping people relax, modeling, and perhaps saving them from "nasty pitfalls."

Teachers share with colleagues both their experiences and familiar areas of work that they have done with children in the past. They stressed, however, that they did not offer "tips about how to do things" or tell people how to teach "by numbers." They were concerned that one encourage other teachers to "think about children and learning."

Supporting the process of helping others are "good personal relationships" which demonstrate genuine interest and concern for them. A system of support may emerge in which one teacher is available to another and ready to respond when needed. A democratic flavor is also important to these relationships:

> D: So how they interpret that in their classrooms has to be their growth process--has to be. They have to be

> the agents of their own changes as they expect children to be agents of their own learning. They have to do that; that's about as democratic as you're going to be able to do it.

When people encourage others, it must be a process of helping them develop their own approaches to teaching. There can be no impositions of one's ideas on others, if only, as one person expressed it, because one "might be wrong."

However, these teachers also recognized the benefits of being a good example for others, of modeling both teaching practices and the processes of reflection. One head described his working with teachers--"alongside" them--as a way of talking and thinking together as a team in order to "grow and learn." If disagreements occur, one must "thrash" things out and talk it through. The purpose, though, is not to create clones but perhaps, through a "continual exchange of ideas and information," to build a group of like-minded individuals who work and develop together.

Educational Challenges Which Have Influenced Professional Development

Different people conceptualize the challenges they face in different ways. Nevertheless, the teachers repeatedly discussed situations which perplexed them and pushed them to grow professionally in the past. They also described similar situations in their current experience and as they looked to the future.

One individual observed the importance of challenges in his life--when "I start to feel comfortable . . . I need and want something more." Challenges were generally identified as either related to one's own development as a teacher or caused by some external force. The former include efforts to individualize one's teaching, to adjust to the great demands of teaching in primary education after working in a secondary school, and to consider carefully how to include a strong knowledge base in the primary school without losing the benefits of first-hand experience in learning. Interestingly, the appearance of the National Curriculum and its accompanying demands is the only example the teachers offered of a challenge from an external force. However, the concern in this discussion is not so much to characterize the nature of these challenges to teachers but to indicate how they perceived their responses to them.

One teacher remarked that he relies on intuition more and more, especially since he believes teaching is a creative job. He also indicated that when challenged he searches for a "theoretical notion" to help him think things through and seeks out any similarity in the situation to what he has experienced before. In addition, he noted that he relies on what he believes "about what children should be doing in school." Another teacher also stressed the importance of beliefs in meeting challenges:

> M: Originally when I first started teaching, I did not enjoy it at all. I don't think I enjoyed it at all for five or six years. I began to really enjoy teaching when I came here. And I think it was then

> because I was beginning to live by real principles, beginning to do what I really believed in, and I was beginning to really think about what I was doing.

There was recognition that dramatic change to meet significant challenges in classroom interactions is not possible overnight. What seemed important to these teachers was to "stick to" one's ideas and one's goals in the process of working through an issue.

The teachers extensively discussed the challenges presented by the National Curriculum and its attendant policies of testing and local management of schools. One teacher saw the curriculum as an opportunity to "toughen up information I don't have myself and to widen the areas I do work in." She also admitted she was "trying very hard to refuse to be worried by it." But many of the teachers see the National Curriculum as a threat to the kind of education they are committed to, even though they acknowledged that with "very careful planning" and a strong enough commitment they could "dovetail all of those [documents]" with their current practices and resist "teaching toward [the] tests." Such an approach would demand much of a teacher:

> B: It makes more demands on a teacher in planning and thinking through and looking for the prospective events that could arise by choosing that. People who think less deeply will go to a textbook or set of history textbooks. . . . That's easy because someone else has done the thinking. But to actually try to work, take the canal as a starting point, and to tease out all those different aspects of the curriculum from that one starting point is actually much more demanding and thought-provoking and has to take a teacher much deeper into himself.

Some of the teachers also chose to see the possibilities in the National Curriculum. For example, it could result in poorer schools doing a better job of teaching. According to another view, what needs to be done is to define the curriculum carefully and to "find a middle ground" between more structured teaching and teaching based on first-hand experience. In essence, several teachers seemed to recognize that they needed to "take on board the new legislation" and simultaneously interpret and adapt it to be flexible.

> D: At the moment I'm committed to the belief that the work can be done like we've always done it; but planning, time management, and really, really thinking through what we're doing in the classroom is now crucial.

One teacher reminded himself that teachers have always had to operate in a social, political, and economic context which changes over time and according to situation; he predicted that teachers would probably continue to help children "to get the best within the constraints. . . . If we have to change our practices, . . . that does not necessarily mean a change in values."

A Holistic Perspective on the Data

Cross-category themes emerged throughout the course of the study. However, they seemed particularly evident when I found it difficult to relate certain interview material to a particular category; overlaps between categories and connections among them thus built up to suggest the nature of the cross-category themes within the data. There are flavors or tones to the conversations as a whole which provide yet another source of possible themes.

The previous discussion of the data presented a composite view by category of how these expert teachers viewed their own professional development. There are risks in such a process since the individual's perspective is diluted, along with the inherent contradictions and inconsistencies people constantly display in their lives. These contradictions may be more fruitful in suggesting dominant themes than the current process allowed.

There is also the significant challenge of attempting to capture, through the analysis of mere words, something as fundamental and yet as abstract as a process. The examination of professionals' perceptions of their own development extends the challenge even further. When one also appreciates the task of informants recalling and interpreting events from their earlier histories, one acknowledges the limitations of fragile memories in retrieving relevant data; the challenge to the researcher may thus be monumental. Here my ethnographic experiences in these contexts were found most useful; informants' descriptions could be set against the backdrop of school life as carefully observed over time in order to gain broader perspective.

The analysis of the conversations provides several cross-category themes which add to our understanding of how expert teachers see their own professional growth. For example, the overarching influence of people on experts' professional development was the dominant theme to which informants referred, even when they discussed particular events in their lives or specific settings. Such is understandable since social institutions are themselves made up of people, people are the actors in the dramatic moments of our lives, and people collectively form professional contexts. Furthermore, people are always existing in the context of events and within the institutions which shape their lives. Clear separation of categories is indeed difficult to maintain, even if it were desirable.

These educators inevitably focused on people even when they began their discussions with more abstract concerns such as the educational challenges which influenced their professional development. Again, this focus is not surprising since any discussion of education leads to the role of people in this most human of endeavors. Perhaps the importance of the focus on people in these conversations arises not from the particular individuals involved but because the process of interaction is so central to human development.

This line of thought, however, should not imply that certain categories become meaningless in discussing experts' professional development. Cross-category themes usually reflect how one dimension, as subject, relates to

another which serves to elucidate it. What becomes meaningful is the nature of the interrelationships among the categories.

To that end, the following diagram shows how certain categories of the data relate to each other as the to-be expert teacher moves through different stages of professional development. Berliner's (1986, 1988) view of the evolution of teachers' expertise through developmental stages is instructive here. Several of the teachers also recognized professional development as proceeding through several stages. However, the interview data suggest that, beyond developmentalism, the interrelationships among the categories may change as one's career proceeds.

Major Influences at Different Stages

In Becoming an Expert Teacher

Preservice Teacher Education	Early Career	Developmental Period	The Mature Teacher

D (Preservice Teacher Education) = Interaction with people, schools, readings as structured by the institution

C (Early Career) = People, schools, education authorities which constitute one's professional context

B (Developmental Period) = Teacher-chosen opportunities for professional growth which include interaction with people, courses, readings

A (The Mature or Expert Teacher) = Teacher reflection and development which brokers the influences of contexts and selected professional-development opportunities

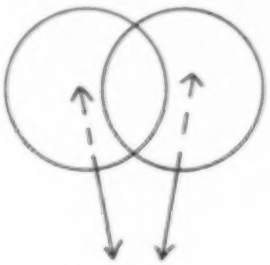
In this diagram the influences on teachers' professional development are seen as relating to stages of professional growth. In their careers teachers move from their preservice teacher-education experiences toward the emergence of the mature teacher. The process is sequential and developmental. However, the major influences at each stage in the process are also evident to varying degrees at other stages. Indeed, the mature teacher orchestrates the complex interactions among all these influences, but out of the perspective arising from much reflection and analysis.

If we consider only the influences on expert teachers' continual professional development, we have the following diagram:

Major Influences in the Professional

Life of the Expert Teacher

Professional Contexts	Teacher-chosen Opportunities for Professional Growth
[Political Environment, School Environment, Key Events, Colleagues]	[The Selection of Courses, Events, and Tasks with which to interact and the Identification of People with whom to interact]



Teacher Reflection and Development

The arrows indicate influence occurring in both directions. When expert teachers interact with their professional contexts and with opportunities for professional growth, they both change them and are changed by them. The relationships which then develop are both dynamic and synergistic.

The overlap between the two dimensions in the professional life of the expert teacher is also significant. Many opportunities we choose to pursue exist already within our professional environment. Furthermore, our professional settings may both stimulate us to identify certain areas for development and growth and provide us with meaningful opportunities to pursue them. Serendipity does play a role here. However, while there are both chosen and unchosen influences to professional growth, both shape how we become.

One informant underscored the complexity of the process of professional growth by emphasizing that development occurs in many strands of one's professional life--in teaching practice, within the relationships one has with colleagues, and through involvement with more formal opportunities for

learning such as inservice courses. He argued that if growth occurs in one area, one would then be able to get more from the others. Professional development, then, is neither unidimensional nor evenly experienced in all strands at each point in our lives.

What may control the professional development of expert teachers is the vision they hold about teaching and learning. One individual described the process eloquently:

> H: So your learning is like that. You get these experiences [with people and in schools] and you take on board [some] and reject others. I don't know why you take some and not others, except [that] it goes back to the ideal, to the vision. It must be somewhere in there that you have this notion that if you see practices you think will help you toward that, you bring them on board. If you think it will take you away, you reject them. And then I suppose from then on in, we are all the time doing that. So what starts as a general vision and a broad range of practices, a fairly tenuous range of practices, gradually you are drawing things to firm that up and that eventually causes a narrowing down of certain practices and a clearer vision of what you do and why you do it.

Several themes emerge from the analysis of the interview data which reflect beliefs of these expert teachers about professional development. In this case, a theme is "a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society" (Opler, cited in Spradley, 1979, p. 185). A partial list of some of these themes or beliefs follows:

1. Expert teachers are responsible for their own professional growth.

2. Positive personal relationships among professional colleagues contribute to a person's professional growth in teaching.

3. Not only do colleagues influence each other, but they also have a responsibility to do so.

4. More experienced colleagues have the responsibility to support less experienced colleagues. Both groups of teachers can benefit from the relationship.

5. While professional development cannot be mandated, teachers--and especially expert teachers--are expected to pursue many opportunities for growth in order to be considered true professionals.

6. The mark of an expert teacher is the willingness to struggle to understand the complexity of classroom interaction with children.

The interview data also provide certain flavors to an evolving understanding of how these teachers view their professional development.

These observations merely suggest notions that are characteristic of the data but are not sufficiently well developed in them to warrant a statement of theme. For example, there is indeed a historical tone to some of the teachers' descriptions. They typically cast their accounts of their careers in a form which acknowledges that their professional experiences have changed over the years, not only because of their own development but also because of events in the larger world which influence education. Particular events such as World War II and the publication of the Plowden Report are two cases in point.

In discussions, these expert teachers focus on issues of teaching and curriculum and struggle with how to develop all professionals within the school; their talk reflects a set of school values (Schwartz, 1988) which can profoundly influence their own professional growth and that of others. Moreover, they present themselves as thoughtful, reflective, articulate, analytical, even intellectual people who assume much personal responsibility for what they do with children and how they direct their own lives. Thus, there is also a continuing thread of optimism in their descriptions, even in the face of the major challenges of the National Curriculum. The professional strength which such optimism reflects is impressive; quite likely, their self-confidence and self-assurance, based on years of professional growth and careful reflection, are responsible.

What, then, would these experts offer as advice to teacher-education institutions? Perhaps first and foremost would be a recognition that professional colleagues become the main ingredient in the mix of factors which affect professional growth. Those who are planning to enter the profession need to appreciate how their interactions with others--fellow students, faculty members, teachers in the schools, and children--will likely affect their own development. Students' reflective dialogue based on experiences in actual classrooms spurs on thinking and growth beyond the demonstration of discrete teaching behaviors and the application of "tips for teachers." The effects of such early career experiences could be long-lasting and widespread. "The contribution of teacher education is [therefore] to bring aspiring teachers into a community of principle, of ideas, and of inquiry, and so to prepare them to enter and organize such communities in the schools where they will work" (Bird, Shulman, & Sykes, p. 14).

Teacher educators would thus model these behaviors associated with professional development with their students. They would also communicate values which could help set the stage for their graduates to seek out their own development throughout their careers. They would share their understandings of pedagogical knowledge and their questions about it. They would be available for on-going dialogue with students, both in formal settings as well as in informal ones. And they would help them develop a vision for teaching and learning in primary schools.

While it seems possible that future expert teachers may have predilections to function in certain ways, it also seems most appropriate that teacher educators encourage them in those directions even while they are students at the university. The responsibilities of teacher educators would continue following students' graduation; teacher educators would continue to

dialogue with their less-experienced colleagues about substantive issues of teaching and learning, nurture their efforts, and affirm and acclaim their accomplishments.

Much remains to be done in formulating an inclusive view of the processes underlying the professional development of expert primary teachers. The concept of mentoring, for example, may play a critical role. Indeed one must also continue to have many conversations with expert pedagogues to find out more how they have developed their personal practical knowledge about children, the curriculum, teaching, learning, and their own professional growth. Thereby we might further the education of future teachers and thus the primary children whom they will serve.

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